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Neopatrimonialism in Latin America: Prospects and Promises of a Neglected Concept

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Abstract

Neopatrimonialism relates to the co-existence of two different logics of political domination: legal-rational rule, which is associated with modern statehood, and patrimonial rule, which corresponds to the traditional type of domination. In recent years, the concept has been applied to characterize political authority in a number of states in different world regions. But despite the fact that elements of neopatrimonial rule can also be found in many Latin American countries, the concept has not taken hold in the scholarship carried out on that region. This paper first explains how neopatrimonialism relates to the dominant approaches in the scholarly debates on Latin American politics, and then it discusses the potential benefits of the concept of neopatrimonialism. It argues that neopatrimonialism provides a more complex characterization of political rule on both the political and the administrative levels than more frequently applied concepts such as neopopulism.

Keywords: Latin America, neopatrimonialism, informal institutions, domination

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Zusammenfassung

Neopatrimonialismus in Lateinamerika:

Chancen und Perspektiven eines unbeachteten Konzeptes

Der Begriff Neopatrimonialismus bezieht sich auf die gleichzeitige Existenz zweier unterschiedlicher Herrschaftslogiken: der legal-rationalen Herrschaft, die mit moderner Staatlichkeit verbunden ist, und der patrimonialen Herrschaft, die zum traditionellen Typus politischer Herrschaft gehört. In den vergangenen Jahren ist das Konzept angewendet worden, um politische Herrschaft in zahlreichen Staaten verschiedener Weltregionen zu charakterisieren. Obwohl sich auch in vielen Ländern Lateinamerikas Elemente neopatrimonialer Herrschaft finden, hat sich das Konzept in der Lateinamerika-Forschung nicht durchgesetzt. Dieser Beitrag erklärt zunächst, in welchem Verhältnis Neopatrimonialismus zu den vorherrschenden Ansätzen in der Lateinamerika-Forschung steht, und diskutiert anschließend die potenziellen Vorteile des Neopatrimonialismuskonzeptes. Dabei wird argumentiert, dass Neopatrimonialismus im Vergleich zu häufig angewendeten Ansätzen wie Neopopulismus eine komplexere Charakterisierung politischer Herrschaft sowohl auf der politischen als auch auf der administrativen Ebene ermöglicht.

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Karsten Bechle

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1 Introduction

While experts on African politics tend to be quite familiar with the concept of neopatrimonialism, those scholars who deal with Latin American politics often barely know the approach. After the foundations were laid in the 1970s (Roth 1968; Eisenstadt 1973),¹ the concept was developed predominantly with regard to African politics (Le Vine 1980; Médard 1982; Bratton/van de Walle 1994, 1997; Chabal/Daloz 1999; Erdmann 2002). Particularly in the 1980s and early 1990s, research focused on African countries. The operationalization of neopatrimonialism was thus mainly grounded in African real types. This notwithstanding, the con-

¹ While Roth distinguished between “traditionalist patrimonialism” and a modern form of “personal rulership,” Eisenstadt was the first to use the term “neo-patrimonialism.” For a detailed account of the evolution and application of the term cf. Erdmann/Engel (2007).

cept has more recently been applied to an increasing number of countries in other world regions, such as the Middle East, Central Asia and Southeast Asia (e.g. Hutchcroft 1998; Ishiyama 2002; Webber 2006; Ilkhamov 2007; Pawelka 2002). Yet the concept has not taken hold in the scholarship carried out on Latin America. Is this because there are substantial differences in the way politics is carried out in Latin America? Or could neopatrimonialism also be a suitable approach to contemporary Latin America? In this paper I will argue the latter.

By the beginning of the 1990s, virtually all Latin American countries had left behind their authoritarian pasts and established electoral democracies (Hagopian/Mainwaring 2005). But the third wave of democratization (Huntington 1991) did not result in full-fledged democracies. Rather, it produced a large number of what some observers called "hybrid regimes" or "democracies with adjectives" (Collier/Levitsky 1997). While minimal procedural assets of democracy are largely guaranteed in these countries, many of them suffer from weak institutions of horizontal accountability, low levels of interest representation, and a lack of public confidence in state institutions. Eventually it became clear that most of these countries are no longer in a process of transition from authoritarianism to democracy but that they have become stuck in a gray zone in between them (Carothers 2002).

While the literature on democratic transitions locates these states on a continuum between authoritarian and democratic regimes, neopatrimonialism approaches the phenomenon from another perspective by asking how political authority is exercised in these countries. Since it corresponds to a different logic than regime typologies, neopatrimonialism is not confined to political rule in hybrid regimes, but is also compatible with authoritarian rule (Erdmann/Engel 2007; Timm 2010). The term builds on Weber's sociology of domination (Weber 2005). For Weber, patrimonialism and feudalism are subtypes of traditional authority. Patrimonial domination implies that power is wielded on the basis of personal relations and that no differentiation between the private and the public sphere is made. The discretionary exercise of power by the ruler is bound only by tradition.

Weber contrasts patrimonialism, or traditional domination, with two other ideal types of legitimate authority: legal-rational authority and charismatic authority. The former takes place at a more "advanced" stage in the evolution of state and society than does patrimonialism. Under legal-rational rule, power is exercised on a rational basis and the public sphere is separated from the private. Legal-rational domination is thus deemed to supplant patrimonialism in the course of modernization. Charismatic leadership, in contrast, is regarded as a rather short-lived, transitory phenomenon that occasionally punctuates the course of history and often effects major changes or revolutions (cf. Hoffmann 2009 on charisma and revolution in the case of Cuba).

Yet empirical evidence from different world regions suggests that the evolution of legal-rational domination has not always taken place to the full detriment of pre-existing patrimonial practices. Informal institutions have proven far more resilient than modernization theory would have assumed (Lauth 2000; Helmke/Levitsky 2004). This apparent contradiction

might be resolved by the use of neopatrimonialism, which combines legal-rational domination and patrimonialism in a particular way. The concept departs from Weber by challenging the evolutionary perspective on history implicitly involved in his pure types of legitimate domination (cf. Rudolph/Rudolph 1979). In historiographical terms, neopatrimonialism points to the “contemporary of the non-contemporary.” It assumes that patrimonialism and legal-rational domination do not necessarily represent different stages in the development of a state but may well co-exist. That is, informal institutions persist and personal relations remain central at both the political and administrative levels of a given country, even though, at least formally, a modern state with a rational bureaucracy at its disposal is established. The separation of the private and public spheres becomes blurred (Erdmann/Engel 2007: 105). Yet the particularistic use of power by neopatrimonial leaders and office-holders is restrained by a modicum of legal-rationality within public institutions and by the need or the desire to maintain at least the façade of modern statehood.

In order to operationalize neopatrimonialism for empirical research, Bratton and van de Walle (1997) have proposed three informal institutions: “presidentialism,” “systematic clientelism,” and “use of state resources.” By “presidentialism” they mean “the systematic concentration of political power in the hands of one individual, who resists delegating all but the most trivial decision-making tasks.” To avoid the conceptual pitfalls inherent in this ambiguous and inappropriate use of the term, the first dimension of neopatrimonialism could be more adequately described as “personalist power concentration” (cf. also Erdmann/Engel 2007: 102-103; von Soest 2007: 625). The second informal institution, clientelism, implies the “award of personal favours” and, finally, the “use of state resources for political legitimation” is strongly associated with corruption, nepotism and rent-seeking behavior (Bratton/van de Walle 1997: 63-68).

In the case of Latin America, several authors have stressed the importance of informal institutions like clientelism or corruption for an adequate understanding of contemporary politics (Merkel/Croissant 2000; Levitsky/Murillo 2005; Helmke/Levitsky 2006). But these phenomena are usually approached by other concepts.² Some authors refer to rather indigenous terms such as *caudillismo* (Wolf/Hansen 1967), *caciquismo* (Friedrich 1977; Kern 1973), *mandonismo* and *coronelismo* (Carvalho 1997). Furthermore, several decades of lively debates that circled around concepts like populism (Di Tella 1965), corporatism (Wiarda 1973; Schmitter 1974; Malloy 1977), and bureaucratic authoritarianism (O'Donnell 1973; Collier 1979), as well as neopopulism (Demmers et al. 2001; Weyland 2001) and delegative democracies (O'Donnell 1994, 1996), have left their imprint on the way politics is contemplated in regards to contemporary Latin America.

This paper therefore starts with a very brief review of these approaches to Latin American politics and the way they relate to neopatrimonialism. I will argue that the central differ-

² The few notable exceptions include Remmer (1989), Mansilla (1990), Hartlyn (1994), and, recently, Durazo Herrmann (2010).

ence between neopatrimonialism, bureaucratic authoritarianism, and neopopulism rests on their diverging assumptions about the incidence of the concentration of power, systematic clientelism, and the use of state resources. On this basis I will first demonstrate the conceptual benefits of neopatrimonialism and then discuss the empirical convenience of its application to Latin America. In doing so I will address two possible objections: The first holds that bureaucratic authoritarianism represented a critical juncture in Latin America's political development that set it apart from its patrimonial past and directed it on a path towards legal-rational rule. The ensuing democratic regimes followed that path by fostering state reform and implementing structural-adjustment measures. The second objection is that Latin America is still dominated by a large number of populist or neopopulist leaders and that charisma therefore continues to represent a more adequate approach to contemporary politics in many Latin American countries.

By discussing these objections I will show how neopatrimonialism may enhance our understanding of important aspects of contemporary Latin American politics by directing our attention towards those deeply engrained mechanisms and patterns of behavior that have persisted throughout its recent history despite major ruptures, such as the irruption of authoritarianism or neoliberal populist rule. I will conclude by briefly addressing the limits of the concept by discussing two cases where political structures cannot yet—or any longer—be considered neopatrimonial.

2 Conceptual Delineation

Although many of the above-mentioned terms and concepts do still appear in current studies of Latin American politics, most of them have originally been associated with a specific period in the historical development of the region. Some were already coined shortly after independence. *Caciquismo* and *caudillismo*, for instance, emerged with the end of Spanish colonial rule in the early 19th century. When most countries in Spanish America were plunged into chaos and anarchy, local strongmen filled the gap that was left by the colonial authority (Morse 1964: 161-162). Similarly, *coronelismo* and *mandonismo* refer to local strongmen or to the system of domination established by them (Carvalho 1997). To a large extent, these concepts represent Latin American versions of traditional patrimonialism (cf. Teichman 2004: 35). Although these concepts still appear in current studies of Latin American politics (e.g. Corrales 2008), they are often used as mere labels.

The term populism, as originally applied to Latin America, referred to a heterogeneous political coalition whose central pillar was the organized urban labor sector. Di Tella (1965) defined it as “a political movement which enjoys the support of the mass of the urban working class and/or peasantry” and which “is also supported by non-working-class sectors upholding an anti-status quo ideology.” Populism, furthermore, was a means to integrating the growing work force into the political process without radically altering the status quo of the

state and society. It entailed a marked expansion of the state apparatus and an active state involvement in many policy areas. The most emblematic cases of this “classical” populism were the initial governments of Getulio Vargas (1930-1945) in Brazil and Juan Domingo Perón (1946-1955) in Argentina. Both were leaders who successfully built and sustained a populist coalition by a mixture of charisma and a set of policies that aimed to preserve the unity of the different groups within it.

Both populism and its ensuing bureaucratic authoritarianism have been associated with important leaps in the modernization process of Latin American states and societies. The central concern of the debates surrounding both phenomena was how the formation of alliances and changes within these alliances were triggered by modernization, and how this process influenced the political game in those societies (O'Donnell 1973; Oszlak 1980). The emergence of bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes has therefore been considered an almost direct consequence of populism. In this understanding, the main objective of the military regimes in South America was to ensure the capitalist mode of development by insulating it from the growing influence of the “popular sectors,” i.e. those segments of society that had been integrated into political life under populist rule and constituted the most numerous base of the populist coalition. The peculiar coincidence of increasing levels of socioeconomic development and the rise of authoritarianism in countries like Argentina and Brazil explicitly challenged the assumptions made by proponents of modernization theory (Apter 1965; Rostow 1960).

With the transition to democracy, bureaucratic authoritarianism has lost most of its relevance for contemporary Latin American politics. Although, some authors argue that there are important lines of continuity with regard to the corporatist nature of state–society relations. Corporatism has been particularly influential as an analytical tool to deal with bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes (Wiarda 1973; Schmitter 1974; Malloy 1977). But the organization of state and society alongside corporatist structures dates back to colonial rule and also constituted an important element of the earlier populist experiences. Wiarda et al. (2004) thus argue that corporatism is so deeply engrained in Latin America’s political culture that it still accounts for large parts of contemporary politics in the region. But the structural-adjustment measures implemented since the mid-1980s have largely dismantled the scaffolding of corporatism.

Astonishingly, this process has been accomplished most fervently by so-called “neoliberal populists,” a new type of political leader who came to power in many Latin American countries starting in the 1990s. The hallmark of neoliberal populists was an unprecedented mixture between a populist leadership style and techniques, on one hand, and neoliberal policies, on the other—a combination that for several observers represented a contradiction in terms. As little as one decade later, however, neoliberalism had become widely discredited in Latin America. Nevertheless, a new class of populist leaders has been identified, this time emerging from the “new left” (Castañeda 2006).

This somehow unexpected revival of populism at the end of the 20th century notwithstanding, the preceding review of consecutive analytical approaches suggests a high fluidity and a high discontinuity in Latin American politics. Moreover, the irruption of bureaucratic authoritarianism and the subsequent transition to democracy have been interpreted as major departures from Latin America's patrimonial past. Yet if this is true, then how do we explain the ongoing importance of informal institutions such as clientelism or corruption in many Latin American countries? As was explicated in the introduction, clientelism and corruption are manifestations of neopatrimonial rule. Both are often the outcome of the personalist concentration of political power in the hands of the patrons, but clientelism and corruption also buttress the political power of patrons. The particular combination of these three elements distinguishes neopatrimonialism from bureaucratic authoritarianism and populism.

Figure 1 presents an ideal typical depiction of the incidence of those informal institutions in all three approaches. It shows that the defining traits of bureaucratic authoritarianism differ from those of neopatrimonialism in all regards—at least formally.³ In any event, the imposition of legal-rational rule has been a central aim of the military regimes in South America.⁴ Bureaucratic authoritarianism therefore resembles Weber's ideal type of legal-rational rule and excludes clientelism and corruption. The "modern" or "legal-rational" element of bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes manifests itself most explicitly in the technocratic character of state management and the reorientation of the bureaucracy towards effectiveness and efficiency. This also implies a reorganization and contraction of the inefficient state apparatus and the purging of the bureaucracy from particularistic practices. The military governments not only tried to reduce the number of civil servants but also reduced public spending, privatized public enterprises, and de-centralized public services. These tasks were carried out by technocrats, who responded directly to the military leaders. The state bureaucracy was organized according to the rigid and hierarchical structures of the military (Oszlak 1980: 28-31; Vellinga 2004: 38).

³ As I will argue below, the empirical manifestations of both bureaucratic authoritarianism and neopopulism often differed substantially from the ideal typical account given here.

⁴ Most certainly the means to achieve these objectives often differed substantially from legal-rational rule in modern Western societies. According to Schwartzman (1977), this deviation is due to the fact that modern rational domination in Latin America did not emerge on a contractual basis as in Europe. While the traditional patrimonialism of Latin American countries was characterized by the exercise of absolute authority, feudalism—as the traditional form of leadership in most Western European countries—was grounded on a contractual relationship between relatively autonomous units. These contractual power relations evolved into the legal-rational domination of modern capitalist societies, while the exercise of absolute power and the absence of contractual elements in Latin America's patrimonial societies led to the establishment of a bureaucratic domination not bound by formal rationality but merely based on substantive rationality. This form of rationality is only concerned with the outcomes. It is directed towards the achievement of a given goal, even to the detriment of formal rules. In the case of South America's military dictatorships, substantive rationality was grounded on the "raison d'état" as defined by the political elite.

Figure 1: Schematic Depiction of Different Forms of Authority

	<i>Neopopulism</i>	<i>Bureaucratic authoritarianism</i>	<i>Neopatrimonialism</i>
Foundation of authority	charisma	legal-rational	legal-rational and traditional
Personalist power concentration	yes	no	yes
Clientelism	no	no	yes
Corruption	undetermined	no	yes

Source: Author's compilation.

The interrelation between neopopulism and neopatrimonialism is more difficult to establish. Neopopulism can be defined as “a political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers” (Weyland 2001: 14). Following Weber’s classification of legitimate authority, populism rests on charismatic authority. For many scholars, charisma constitutes one—if not *the*—central attribute of populism. Conniff, for instance, maintains that “all populists are charismatic, but not all charismatic leaders are populists” (1999: 193). Even though others reject the view that charisma is central to the definition of populism and consider it to be a subordinate phenomenon, they still recognize the overall importance of charisma for populist leadership (cf. Weyland 2001: 12-14; Barr 2009: 41).

But although neopopulism and neopatrimonialism rest on different conceptual foundations, both display a strong concentration of political power at the top of the political system.⁵ The main difference between neopatrimonialism and neopopulism is the role of clientelism. While clientelism, or the provision of personal favors, is a central category of neopatrimonial leadership, a high degree of clientelism is incompatible with neopopulism (cf. also Kitschelt 2000: 852). This may appear counter-intuitive at first sight, since particularly the early populist experiences were associated with large movements and often relied on clientelist linkages. Starting in the 1990s, however, neopopulists could no longer recur to clientelist bonds. In fact, many neoliberal populists deprived themselves of their own clientele by shrinking the state apparatus and privatizing public enterprises.⁶ At the same time, however, they established new links through special programs targeted towards their core constituencies. Clientelism has been completely absent neither from the early populist experiences nor from its contemporary offshoots. But if clientelist linkages become so dominant that the relationship between leader and followers is turned into one of patron and clients, if charisma is replaced by pragmatic exchange relations, then political rule is no longer based on populism (Weyland 2001: 14; Barr 2009: 42).

⁵ This is also true for definitions of populism that build on discourse rather than on political strategy (cf. Laclau 2005).

⁶ Advocates of an economic definition of populism based on elements such as developmentalism, economic nationalism, and social welfare programs therefore refuse to consider neoliberal politicians to be neopopulists (cf. Weyland 2001: 9).

The interrelation between neopopulism and corruption is undetermined. Although there may be good reasons to argue that neopopulism favors the spread of corruption (e.g. Weyland 1998), the concept itself focuses exclusively on the strategies and techniques employed by political leaders. Corruption thus may or may not emerge as a consequence of the concentration of power inherent to populist rule. Neopopulism in general has little to say about the political structures on the lower scales. While neopatrimonialism also exhibits itself within the functioning of the state bureaucracy, neopopulism disregards politics at the administrative level.

Charisma also lies at heart of “delegative democracies,” the most salient of all “democracy-with-adjectives” conceptions in the Latin American context. Although “delegative democracy” focuses on the level of political regimes and thus responds to a logic different than neopatrimonialism, the concept deserves some consideration because it has been associated with neopatrimonial patterns in Latin America (e.g. Hartlyn 1994: 94). O’Donnell characterizes delegative democracies by a lack of well-functioning institutions replaced by “other non-formalized but strongly operative practices—clientelism, patrimonialism, and corruption” (1994: 59). He considers both “neopatrimonial and delegative practices of rule” equivalent to particularism, or “nonuniversalistic relationships, ranging from hierarchical particularistic exchanges, patronage, nepotism, and favors to actions that, under the formal rules of the institutional package of polyarchy, would be considered corrupt” (1996: 40).

This notwithstanding, the most salient aspect of delegative democracy has always been its reference to “a caesaristic, plebiscitarian executive that once elected sees itself as empowered to govern the country as it deems fit” (O’Donnell 1996: 44). This charismatic component of delegative democracy not only located it within the context of neopopulism but also provided for the adjective that distinguishes it from other conceptions of democracy. Consequently, the academic debates that unfolded around delegative democracy focused almost exclusively on the question of whether presidential power is, as O’Donnell postulates, exercised in an undue manner, mainly because institutions of horizontal accountability do not function adequately (Llanos 2001; Panizza 2000; Peruzzotti 2001).

3 Heuristic Advantages

Having established the differences and the interrelation between neopatrimonialism and several of the dominant approaches to Latin American politics, I will in this section address the questions of whether neopatrimonialism could provide an additional advantage over the concepts discussed above, and in which ways the concept could improve our understanding of Latin American politics. As has already been explicated, empirical research on neopatrimonialism still exhibits a clear bias towards African cases. Yet the concept itself is not restricted to a particular regional setting. Applying neopatrimonialism to different regional contexts would not only help to revise its heuristic value more generally but also improve

the possibility of inter- and cross-regional comparison (Basedau/Köllner 2007: 111-112). The promising results of an increasing number of studies carried out on neopatrimonialism in other world regions corroborate this claim.

Moreover, applying neopatrimonialism to Latin America might help us overcome the problem of parochialism (Sartori 1970, 1991). From the above-mentioned Latin American versions of patrimonialism, *caudillismo* is used in virtually all countries of the region, while *caciquismo* is more restricted in its application, and *mandonismo* and *coronelismo* are only used in Brazil. In Africa, powerful individuals are usually referred to as “big men” while the term “bossism” (Sidel 1999, 2004) stems from the Southeast Asian background.

For historical purposes, the distinction between a *cacique* in Mexico and a *coronel* in Brazil may provide important insights about the evolution of patron–client networks in different countries. But given the dynamic nature of such relations over time and the ensuing terminological metamorphoses (cf. Roniger 1987), these differences get blurred. Moreover, since such terms are often used without a proper definition and their meanings vary from one author to the other, their value for our understanding of current political developments is unclear. For Roniger, both *caciquismo* and *coronelismo* represent local or regional expressions of clientelist brokerage, while *caudillismo* is situated at a higher level of the political system. Carvalho (1997), on the other hand, argues that the Brazilian *mandonismo* comes closest to *caciquismo* in the Hispano-American literature. *Mandonismo* was characteristic of traditional politics, while *coronelismo* represented Brazil’s national political system at a specific historical moment, the First Republic from 1889 to 1930. Furthermore, the use of these terms is not always restricted to one region. Anderson (1988), for instance, applied the term “cacique” to the Philippines, a former Spanish colony in Southeast Asia.

For comparative purposes, the large number of different terms and their often imprecise and confusing use represents a great challenge (cf. also Basedau/Köllner 2007: 116). Unless historical differences between (local) strongmen in different countries or regions that exhibit neopatrimonial structures do not persist and are thus not represented in their contemporary versions, there is no use in using different terms whose meanings are often unclear and that are difficult to compare.

Yet, unlike the indigenous terms discussed here, concepts such as clientelism or corruption are universally applicable. I have used their incidence in the heuristic approaches discussed in the preceding section to delineate bureaucratic authoritarianism and neopopulism from neopatrimonial rule. Yet it is also possible to use clientelism or corruption as concepts in their own right. And this raises the question of whether it is necessary to rely on the concept of neopatrimonialism if Latin American politics can also be described by clientelism or corruption. The answer to this question depends on the subject of inquiry. Gordin (2002), for example, approaches the phenomenon of clientelism by analyzing the government’s spending on salaries. This approach is straightforward and parsimonious. Yet he also recognizes that

“conclusive inferences about the nature of clientelism in Latin America” cannot be drawn from this analysis without a subsequent triangulation through a qualitative analysis (2002: 534).

It is therefore often indispensable to focus on the broader context in order to reach meaningful results. And this focus exacts appropriate theoretical and methodological approaches. Otherwise, concepts run the risk of being stretched. Mungiu-Pippidi (2006), for instance, distinguishes between different dimensions of corruption. She argues that in contrast to developed countries, where corruption usually refers to the individual infringement of the norm of integrity, in developing countries and post-communist states, it is inherently political. In these countries, “corruption actually means ‘particularism’” and, consequently, can “only be understood in conjunction with the stage of development of a particular state or society” (Mungiu-Pippidi 2006: 87). She thus distinguishes three political regime types on the basis of corruption. But if terms like “corruption” change their meaning in different country contexts, definitional boundaries become blurred and concepts become fuzzy.

Depending on the subject of inquiry, it might therefore be more reasonable to use the concept of neopatrimonialism in order to incorporate and organize otherwise disparate elements such as clientelism, nepotism, and corruption under a common analytical focus and thus avoid the temptation of conceptual stretching (cf. Médard 1982: 185). The concept could even help us understand contradictory movements within the different manifestations of neopatrimonial rule. Neopatrimonial states and/or their leaders are often subject to both external and internal pressures, particularly in electoral democracies. This may result in certain adaptations or even changes within one or another dimension of neopatrimonialism. Yet, decreases in one dimension of neopatrimonialism may be recompensed by increases in another, thus maintaining the neopatrimonial state as a whole.

In Peru, for instance, President Fujimori considerably reduced personnel spending during his first administration by drastically reducing clientelist structures in the middle and lower echelons of the administration. At the same time, however, he gathered personal friends and followers within the Ministry of the Presidency that was created under his precursor, Alan García, and granted it a generous budget (Gordin 2002: 540-541). Likewise in Mexico and Argentina, the impact of market liberalization was softened by clientelist recompensation for the underprivileged core constituencies of the governing parties and the correspondent opportunities for national business groups (Fox 1994; Gibson 1997). Because social emergency funds were usually managed by the office of the president, they, too, often became an instrument of neopatrimonial practices (Vellinga 2004: 40).

In many countries, the reduction of clientelist practices through the downsizing of the public administration and the privatization of state-owned enterprises did not necessarily entail a reduction of the overall level of neopatrimonialism, because the whole process of privatization and deregulation was accompanied by corruption and the formation of new clientelist constituencies (Kitschelt 2000: 863). Neopatrimonialism was fostered by growing pressures from international financial institutions and rewarded by the large amount of cred-

its and foreign investments that were flooding into Latin America at the time. This, in turn, provided governments throughout the region with the funds they needed to maintain neopatrimonialism as a whole.

4 Empirical Convenience

In the preceding section, I showed some heuristic benefits that can be derived from the application of neopatrimonialism to Latin America. But this does not yet prove that neopatrimonialism provides an adequate description of current Latin American politics. I will discuss that topic below, paying particular attention to two possible objections: The first one relates to the question of whether bureaucratic authoritarianism did not represent an important juncture in the political development of the region. The second one is related to the question of whether charisma or populism—despite, or maybe even because of, their narrower focus on the top of the state—do not provide more adequate accounts of current Latin American developments.

For several observers, the irruption of bureaucratic authoritarianism represented a clear departure from the region's patrimonial tradition. While under the preceding populist experiences, authority was still centralized in the hands of a charismatic leader at the top of the state and the expansion of the state provided vast opportunities for clientelist practices like the distribution of jobs or material rewards, the emergence of bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes has been interpreted as an important juncture. Bratton and van de Walle (1994) therefore argue that Latin America's bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes lack the central characteristics of the neopatrimonial state (Vellinga 2004: 38). Bureaucratic authoritarianism was considered incompatible with neopatrimonialism since established rules were followed in the former and military rule usually did not tend to concentrate power in the hands of one dominant leader. Because of their bureaucratic-authoritarian legacy, or because of the role of elite pacts in Latin American transitions, most countries in the region have been dismissed as examples of neopatrimonial rule. Neopatrimonialism in this perspective was confined to Africa and a small number of other states, such as Haiti, the Philippines and Indonesia (Bratton/van de Walle 1994: 459).

Yet the clear division between bureaucratic authoritarianism and neopatrimonialism is misleading—not only because neopatrimonialism involves, per definition, a certain "level" of legal-rational rule, but also because, on closer inspection, Latin America's bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes display in practice many more elements of patrimonial rule than suggested by the stylized differentiation of both concepts presented above. Cavarozzi (1992) has shown how politics in the region has been dominated by a set of mechanisms that occurred from the early 1930s to the late 1970s, thus encompassing both populist and the earlier bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes of the 1960s. What he labeled the "state-centered matrix" was economically characterized by import-substituting industrialization, a closed economy,

state-regulated markets, and moderate inflation. Politically, it depended on the state's control of markets for goods and labor through a series of inducements and constraints. Yet within this period, the expansion of the state apparatus led to a further intensification of patrimonial patterns such as clientelism rather than an enhancement of state efficiency (Cavarozzi 1992: 672-673; Vellinga 2004: 32-33).

Not till the 1970s did the newly established dictatorships in Chile, Argentina and Uruguay prompt a break with the development strategies of their predecessors and begin to dismantle the state apparatus (Cavarozzi 1992: 677). But neopatrimonial practices were never completely eradicated. The efforts of the bureaucratic-authoritarian leaders were largely directed towards corporations and some key ministries, especially the ministry of economics, and never reached the whole state apparatus. Informal institutions like clientelism persisted under military rule (Kaufman 1977: 113).

The later bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes furthermore differed from Weber's conception of legal-rational domination with regard to the role and function of the state bureaucracy. Beyond the establishment of ideological filters for the recruitment of public servants in leadership positions and the removal of ideologically untrustworthy personnel, in many cases parallel military hierarchies were established alongside the pre-existing bureaucracies. This resulted in a complicated system of parallel lines of authority that often required intervention by superiors. The bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes also failed to achieve stronger state autonomy. Depending on implicit or explicit accords with determined entrepreneurial groups, public policies continued to benefit certain privileged sectors of the national or transnational capital (Oszlak 1980: 29-30).

Finally, not all bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes have been exempt from neopatrimonial concentrations of power. In the case of Chile, for example, the term "bureaucratic authoritarianism" rather obscures the personalistic and discretionary features central to the authoritarian rule exercised by General Pinochet (Remmer 1989; cf. also Teichman 2004).

In sum, although bureaucratic authoritarianism clearly aimed to break with patrimonial features of the past, its empirical manifestations did not differ so much from neopatrimonialism as to conclude that the existence of bureaucratic authoritarianism was an impediment to the formation of neopatrimonial rule. In fact, most of the patrimonial patterns that had already existed before and during the early populist experiences have not been eradicated by bureaucratic authoritarianism. By focusing on the underlying structures of political authority, neopatrimonialism thus highlights some important lines of continuity implicitly or explicitly blurred or obscured by the different alternative approaches that have prevailed in recent decades. This also holds true for the post-transitional period.

Democratization represented another sea change in the political development of Latin America. For a moment, it appeared as if legal-rational rule would finally prevail in the whole region. Latin America seemed to enter a completely new era, grounded on the return of democratic rule, state reform, and economic liberalization. Some external observers had

already proclaimed the “end of history” under the general rule of liberal democracy (Fukuyama 1992,) and in the economic realm, governments throughout the whole region implemented a paradigm shift by subscribing to the “Washington consensus” (Williamson 1990, 2004). The structural-adjustment programs applied in most countries seemed completely incompatible with traditional politics. And the new technocracy—which had assumed important positions in many Latin American administrations during the 1980s and throughout most of the 1990s—distanced itself sharply from any kind of non-rational behavior and those informal practices that had been prevalent among the bureaucracies of the region for some time.

Yet it soon turned out that the structural-adjustment measures implemented under the Washington consensus did not bring about the end of patrimonial residues. Argentina, for instance, had become one of the foremost reformers in the region during the presidency of Carlos Menem (1989-1999). Within a very short period of time, Argentina deregulated its labor market, privatized most of its state-owned enterprises, and reduced the number of civil servants, thus reducing the state’s ability to pork-barrel. Still, this did not eliminate informal institutions. The need to reconcile the whole reform process with the claims of powerful provincial leaders and union bosses resulted in a watering-down of the reforms and the survival of illiberal enclaves. Furthermore, the whole process was accompanied by an exceeding amount of corruption, and the privatization of state-owned enterprises favored those economic elites that had before the reforms profited from public-works concessions and state contracts (Panizza 2000: 757).

A similar pattern has been observed in the reform processes in Peru (Roberts 1995; Solfrini 2001; Barr 2003) and a number of other Latin American countries throughout the 1980s and the 1990s (Demmers et al. 2001; Teichman 2004; Llamazares 2005). The use of traditional forms of politics has often been instrumental to the alleged modernization of the state and its institutions. In some cases, it has even been a functional necessity for the survival of ruling political parties (Gibson 1997). Moreover, many of the region’s topmost reformers and most fervent subscribers to the new paradigm have been charged with corruption and other crimes during or after their terms in office: Carlos Menem (1989-1999) in Argentina, Carlos Salinas de Gortari in Mexico (1988-1994), Alberto Fujimori in Peru (1990-2000), and Fernando Collor de Mello (1990-1992) in Brazil.

Most of these post-transitional leaders have been analyzed under the heading of neoliberal populism. Due to their apparent failure to generate sustainable economic growth or to mitigate social inequality in their countries, however, neoliberalism remained a rather short-lived experience. Its failure eventually contributed to the emergence of another group of neopopulist leaders, this time from the left side of the political spectrum (Walker 2008: 13). Just like most of their neoliberal predecessors, leftist populists such as Hugo Chávez (since 1999) in Venezuela, Evo Morales (since 2006) in Bolivia, and Rafael Correa (since 2007) in Ecuador, are former political outsiders (Mayorga 2006; Barr 2009). Initially, none of them disposed of large and long-established party machines or clientelistic networks that would al-

low them to rally substantial parts of the electorate behind them. Nor did they have access to state resources from which to distribute pork-barrel benefits among potential followers. It might thus be argued that their personal appeal gained them office, and their ascendancy might be better explained by charisma than by neopatrimonialism. Although this argument could be rejected by suggesting that, for example, the election of Evo Morales was also due to ethnic considerations and that the empowerment of an indigenous president might have generated expectations among the indigenous majority in Bolivia about future benefits to be derived from the ensuing access to state resources.

But even if charisma constitutes an important ingredient in Latin American politics, a core difference between neopopulism and neopatrimonialism is that the former is much more unstable than the latter. Public approval is central to populist rule. And sooner or later it tends to vanish if not corroborated by other means. Initially, a charismatic figure from outside the political establishment and the traditional parties may garner support from large sectors of the constituency by promising radical change. Charismatic leaders often define their plans of action in revolutionary terms—like the “Bolivarian revolution” of Hugo Chávez, Raffael Correa’s “citizen’s revolution,” the “democratic revolution” promised by Evo Morales, or Carlos Menem’s “productive revolution.” These leaders often pledge to put an end to the corruption and particularism of the incumbent administration and the state apparatus.

But votes are volatile and public support may soon shrink if a leader is not able to deliver whatever he promised. Imperiled office-holders therefore tend to face two political options: either they arrange themselves with the relevant political forces in the country and obtain their backing through some form of side payment, or they may soon disappear from the political scene, as did Fernando Collor de Mello in Brazil or Abdalá Bucaram (1996-1997) in Ecuador (cf. also Panizza 2000). If they have accrued enough political power, they may alternatively try to completely exchange pre-existing networks, as happened in Peru under Fujimori (Palmer 2004: 99-100). This may also explain why political outsiders have often turned to constitutional reforms once they were elected to office. Changing the constitution of a country implies changing the rules of the political game and therefore offers great opportunities to replace existing networks.

Populism or charisma may thus be an important ingredient in understanding how a leader assumes power in Latin America’s electoral democracies. However, for an incumbent leader to stay in power, it is necessary to sooner or later routinize charismatic leadership by installing an independent power base. It is therefore often difficult to determine when populist rule morphs into mere neopatrimonialism. Is Hugo Chávez still a populist leader, or does his power rely on clientelist linkages? What is the dominant source of power? Is the public support he receives in elections due to his personal appeal or is it a consequence of the ongoing institutionalization of his “socialism of the 21st century” through the installation of *misiones* and other measures? And when exactly did this relationship change? What about

the ingredients of *Menemismo* in Argentina or populist experiences in other countries? When does the anti-establishment itself become part of the establishment?

These questions are central to an appropriate understanding of the resilience of neopatrimonialism in Latin American politics. Although populism or charismatic authority may be important factors in bringing about major operational changes—like that from neoliberalism to rather leftist policies—they usually preserve the underlying structures of neopatrimonial rule. The pervasiveness of neopatrimonial structures in the region is also perceptible by a brief glance at the rule of such different political leaders as Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990) in “bureaucratic-authoritarian” Chile, Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994) in “corporatist” Mexico, and “neoliberal populists” Carlos Menem and Alberto Fujimori in Argentina and Peru. In all these cases, the implementation of structural-adjustment measures was pushed through by a newly established technocracy that was isolated from societal influence and that responded directly to the executive. In other words, the execution of neoliberal policies was facilitated by a patrimonial concentration of power (Remmer 1989; Zabludovsky 1989; Teichman 2004).

5 Conclusion

In the preceding sections, I argued that the application of the concept of neopatrimonialism to Latin American cases yields both conceptual and empirical benefits. First of all, doing so could help to clarify the conceptual confusion left by a plethora of older concepts that are often used as mere labels. Second, it would thereby make studies on Latin American informal institutions and especially on the concentration of power more comparable to those of other world regions. Third, it could organize the different literatures on informal institutions in the region under a common analytical umbrella. And fourth, it could improve our understanding of the persistence of democratic deficits over time by drawing our attention away from different regime types and towards the underlying way in which power is wielded.

Yet it should also be emphasized that the concept cannot unconditionally be applied to all Latin American cases. In this paper, neopatrimonialism has been defined and distinguished from other forms of political rule by the incidence of three informal institutions: a concentration of personalist power; systematic clientelism; and particularistic use of state resources. This implies that all three manifestations have to be empirically observable in a given state in order to be classified as neopatrimonial. But this may not always be the case.

Venezuela, for instance, has long fulfilled two of the three main criteria of neopatrimonial rule as defined above: systematic clientelism and particularistic use of state resources. However, it can hardly be argued that during the four decades of Venezuela’s elite democracy under the alternating rule of two clientelist parties, there has also been a strong concentration of power. Although prominent leaders such as Rafael Caldera (1969-1974) or Carlos Andrés Pérez (1974-1979) have been able to accumulate large amounts of political power, Venezuelan

presidents all in all have been comparatively weak. Central decisions of nationwide importance have traditionally been negotiated between the political party in power and the opposition, as well as the representatives of business and labor sectors. The so-called “fourth republic” therefore does not qualify as a full case of neopatrimonialism.

A similar point could be made for contemporary Argentina. Llamazares observes a neopatrimonial environment in Argentina “in so far as it involves the presence of ‘patron-client linkages’ and ‘the blurring of private and public purposes and practices within the administration’” (Llamazares 2005: 1675). But he qualifies his judgment by adding that “centralization of political power is the only typical characteristic of neopatrimonialism that is not present in the informal practices described” (Llamazares 2005: 1692 EN 9). To be sure, Argentina’s political system is far from the concentration of power that characterizes many contemporary neopatrimonial regimes in Africa. Independent media and a strong civil society have acted as important checks to the abuse of presidential powers. At times, the federal system and oppositional majorities in Congress have likewise curtailed executive dominance. Nevertheless, it can hardly be denied that Argentina’s political system still exhibits a strong propensity towards the accumulation of powers in the hands of strong presidents. Both Carlos Menem and Néstor Kirchner (2003-2007) have effectively managed to sidestep institutions of horizontal accountability during large parts of their administrations (Jones 1997; Levitsky/Murillo 2008).

Contemporary Argentina and Venezuela’s elite democracy thus constitute two border cases, where the criterion of neopatrimonial power concentration is neither fully met nor completely absent. Yet the convergence of power in the hands of a strong patron is central both to Weber’s original concept of patrimonialism and to neopatrimonialism. Whereas clientelism and corruption are important manifestations of neopatrimonial rule, they tend to follow from the concentration of power. Relative losses in one of these two dimensions are therefore less important to the survival of neopatrimonial rule than the restriction of power of a neopatrimonial leader.

Cases like Argentina or Venezuela thus cannot be regarded as examples of neopatrimonial rule without succumbing to conceptual stretching. However, since neopatrimonial structures are latent in both, they could be qualified as “contested neopatrimonialism.” In Venezuela, a severe political and socioeconomic crisis brought these structures to the fore. Subsequent to the election of Hugo Chávez, a strong concentration of power rendered the country truly neopatrimonial. Argentina has also teetered on the brink of neopatrimonialism several times in recent decades. Yet proliferation of neopatrimonialism, as has occurred in Venezuela, has been avoided in Argentina, even after it plunged into a deep economic and financial crisis in 2001.

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